

Indiana-bred Hockey

The Indiana Ice is proud to be a part of the United States Hockey League (USHL). This Tier-1 league provides a great hockey atmosphere by developing fresh, up-and-coming players willing to compete at a higher level.

Great players, college scholarships and NHL draft picks are the theme of today's USHL. Since gaining classification as America's only Tier I league in 2002, the USHL has seen a spike in the number of players committing to NCAA Division I universities, the number of players being chosen in the NHL Entry Draft and the number of players ultimately climbing to the NHL.

Four members of the current Ice roster have aspirations to use the USHL as a springboard to the collegiate level. Jake Skjodt, Matt Smith, Cameron Schilling and Alex Handy are all products of the Indiana youth hockey system.

Each of these players has grown up playing hockey right here in Indianapolis and each has followed a similar path to get to the highest Junior level in the nation.

These four Carmel natives developed their skills while playing in the Indiana Youth Hockey Association (IYHA), which originally played out of the Pepsi Coliseum. Each league in Indianapolis is structured to provide a great learning environment for young players of all ages and ability levels.

“Kids can really benefit from a youth hockey program,” says Ice forward Jake Skjodt. “They get to know the basics of the game while working to understand values like good sportsmanship, teamwork, and dedication that extend beyond the sport.”

Jake is following in his father Charlie's footsteps. In his playing days Charlie Skjodt was drafted by the Toronto Maple Leafs, but he later signed with the New York Islanders and spent most of his time playing for their number one affiliate, the Indianapolis Checkers of the CHL. While with the Checkers, Charlie won two Adams Cup Championships and became the second all-time leading scorer in the Central Hockey League.

As a kid Jake grew up trying many different sports but says “hockey has been the most fun.” Coming up through the ranks of the youth hockey program at the Pepsi Coliseum, Jake got his start with the Mini-Mites at age four before progressing up to the Mite league at age six. After he played two years in the Mite league at age nine he participated in the Squirt league for another two years.

When he was 11 he joined the Pee-Wee league, and then at age 13 he started with the Bantams which is an Under-14 triple-A travel league. He continued playing travel hockey with the Indiana Junior Ice of the Mid-America Hockey League before leaving the program to play high school hockey at Cathedral where his team won a State Championship.

After two years with the Irish, Jake believed the competition was stronger when he played at the Midget Major level for the Jr. Ice and decided to return. After one more season with the Junior Ice, he was prepared for his transition to the USHL.

He began his career with the Ice in the 2006-07 season. In his first season Jake posted 20 goals and added 20 points scoring a total of 40 points in 58 games on the year.

Jake sees the Ice pushing forward and building off of their 2007 playoff run to advance deeper into the post-season. After the 2007-2008 season he is excited about his commitment to play Division 1 hockey for the University of Nebraska-Omaha and getting a great education at the same time.

Matt Smith traveled a nearly identical path to that of Skjodt before joining the Indiana Ice.

Matt began his hockey playing days as a youngster around the age of six. He and Jake were teammates throughout their years of play in the IYHA beginning with the Mites and carrying over into the present with the Indiana Ice.

“It has been great growing up with Jake and playing along side him and even better now seeing us both make it this far in our careers both coming from Indiana,” explained Smith.

Matt made an appearance in 51 games for the Ice last season scoring 12 points off of 12 assists and adding 72 penalty minutes. So far this season Matt continues to play a pivotal role on the defensive end for the Ice. He prides himself on being a physical stay at home defenseman that is looking for a momentum changing hit when the opportunity arises.

Although Matt has not made any official visits to college campuses, he intends to lengthen his career by receiving a scholarship to play at the Division-1 level next year.

Playing in his first season in the USHL with the Indiana Ice is defenseman Cameron Schilling.

Cameron grew up playing hockey. Originally from Detroit, Michigan, Cameron moved to the Indianapolis area at a very young age. At the age of six he had already began playing travel hockey for the Midget league as a Mite. With his improvement each year, his love for the game remained constant as he directed his way through Squirts, Pee-Wee, and Triple-A playing in the Bantam travel league.

Now a player for the Ice, Cameron says, “playing at the Pepsi Coliseum on ‘Opening Night’ in front of a hometown crowd with my friends and family in attendance was a tremendous feeling of accomplishment having made it this far in the sport of hockey.”

Cameron has yet to commit to any schools; however, he is looking forward to continuing his play at the collegiate level and hopes to stay here in the Midwest.

The last member of the Indiana foursome on the Ice roster is forward Alex Handy. Alex got his start in the sport when his mother signed him up to play at the age of seven. He has participated in a variety of sports and he continues to play lacrosse for Park Tudor in the off-season.

“Growing up hockey gave me something to do and it kept me active,” Alex explained. “Instead of being out causing trouble I was busy having fun playing hockey.”

Alex likes the attention he receives from playing hockey in Indiana. Even though hockey is not as popular as the more mainstream sports his friends still hound him for seats and even his teachers are approaching him trying to score tickets to watch him play for the Ice.

Like the rest of his fellow Hoosiers, Alex does not want the time to come when he has to hang-up his skates. Alex, Matt, and Cameron are all striving for an opportunity to land a Division-I scholarship during their careers with the Indiana Ice. The Ice provides a perfect opportunity for Indiana hockey players to advance their careers without having to move away from friends and family members.

Indiana Youth Hockey programs are producing more and more highly competitive players year in and year out. These four young athletes from the Indianapolis area have progressed through the local youth hockey ranks and have made the best of every opportunity placed in front of them. The experience and knowledge they have gained through their participation in these programs has helped them develop into USHL caliber players. Now they get the chance to display their talent and peruse their dreams of advancing as far as possible in the sport they love in front of their friends, families, and hometown fans at the Pepsi Coliseum.